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EVOLUTION OF *FOR FEAR (THAT)* IN ENGLISH

This paper addresses the issue of the historical development of *for fear (that)* in English – a prepositional subordinator ushering in finite clauses of purpose in which negation is inherently coded, i.e. the content of the subordinate clause is negated by the complementiser which does not contain a negative particle in itself. The rise of this construction is studied within the theory of grammaticalization and it turns out to be a regular case of grammaticalization following the mechanisms of grammaticalization such as desemanticisation, extension and decategorialisation.

Keywords: *negative purpose, subordination, grammaticalization, for fear*

1. Introduction

Even though adverbial subordinators expressing negative purpose do not constitute the most common type of interclausal relations among world's languages, quite a few of such avertive morphemes can be found in the English language, e.g. *lest*, *enaunter* and *weald*. This paper addresses the issue of the development of another negative purpose subordinator i.e. *for fear that* in the history of the English language from Old English to the Modern English period. The language material for this paper is collected for the most part from The Oxford English Dictionary (OED2) and the electronic corpora of the English language such as DOEC, CMEPV, ARCHER, ICAME and ICAMET. The references to the language illustrations cited in this study follow the conventions of the corpora's compilers. All the translations of the presented material are the author's.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is that of grammaticalisation. I will draw on the four interrelated mechanisms of grammaticalisation, following Heine and Kuteva (2002: 2), Heine (2005: 579), Heine and Kuteva (2005: 15), Heine and Kuteva (2006: 43f.), Heine and Kuteva (2007: 34):

Mechanisms of grammaticalisation:

- a. desemanticisation (or “semantic bleaching,” semantic reduction), i.e. loss (or generalisation) in meaning content;
- b. extension (or context generalization), i.e. the rise of novel grammatical meanings when linguistic expressions are extended to new contexts (context-induced reinterpretation);
- c. decategorialization, i.e. loss in morphosyntactic properties characteristic of the lexical or other less grammaticalised forms, including the loss of independent word status (cliticisation, affixation);
- d. erosion (or “phonetic reduction”), that is loss in phonetic substance.

Although many other mechanisms and parameters of grammaticalisation have been propounded in the literature thus far, I have decided to apply the ones above because they relate to all the main components of grammar which are affected in the process of grammaticalisation, i.e. semantics, pragmatics, morphosyntax and phonetics and they can help identify and describe instances of grammaticalisation.

3. Etymology of *fear* in Old English

Klein (s.v. *fear*) and Chambers (s.v. *fear*) claim that OE *fēr* comes from PIE **pēr-*, a lengthened (ablaut) form of the verbal root **per-* ‘to try, risk’, which is a cognate with Latin *peritus* ‘experienced’, *experītī* ‘to try’, *perīculum* ‘an attempt, danger’, Greek *πεῖρα* (*peîra*) ‘trial, proof’. According to the OED (s.v. *fear*), this etymology appears to be misleading. Instead, it is suggested that the base *fēr* comes from **per* ‘to go through’ though the origin of this meaning is unclear. Skeat (s.v. *fear*): “Originally used of the *perils* and *experiences* of a *way-faring*”. Old English *fēr* derives from Proto-Germanic **fēr-az* ‘danger’ and is cognate with Old Saxon *fār* ‘ambush, danger’, Middle Dutch *vaer*, modern Dutch *gevaar* ‘danger’, Old High German *fāra*, Middle High German *gevære* ‘danger’, modern German *Gefahr* ‘danger’, Old Norse *far* ‘harm, distress, deception,’ Old Icelandic *fār* ‘misfortune, plague’ and the Gothic derivative from *fērja* ‘one who lies in wait, observer, spy’.

In Old English the usual meaning of FÆR is that of ‘sudden or unexpected danger; peril, calamity’ and it is found predominantly in poetry, e.g.

- (1) *duguð wearð afyrhted þurh þæs flodes fæ̆r.*
 tried-warriors became frightened through this flood's peril.
 'The group of warriors was frightened at the peril of flood.'

And 1529

The meaning of 'fear' must have developed (a grammaticalization parameter of desemanticization) through the change of real danger or peril through possible danger to the emotion of uneasiness (metonymy). This use of FEAR developed in late Old English (2a) but it did not gain popularity until Middle English (2b), compare:

- (2) a. pre timore non audeo
*for fore ic ne <dear> (ÆGram ege).*¹
 for fear I not dare
 'Because of fear, I do not dare.'

ÆGram (W) 272.8

- b. *Ech man hadde fere.*
 'Everyone was afraid.'

c1300 SLeg.Pilate (Hrl 2277) 253

4. The rise of *FOR FEAR*

The syntagm *for fear* was practically nonexistent in Old English and Early Middle English. But from around 1300 on it is recorded quite regularly in the language.

- (3) a. *He ne bi-lefte for no fere.*
 'He did not leave because he was not afraid.'

c1290 S. Eng. Leg. I. 82/15

- b. *For fere [Ld: drede] he ful to grounde anon.*
 'For fear he fell down to the ground instantly.'

c1300 SLeg.Chris.(Hrl 2277) 162

Around the same time, a similar construction appeared and continued to be used until the end of the Middle English period, i.e. **for fē̆r(e)d** 'for being frightened, for fear'.² Mustanoja (1960: 561) notes that "for *of fered* there are variant readings like *for ferd*, *of fere*, *for fere*, and *for drede*. In a number of late ME cases the participle shows a remarkably advanced state of substantivisation."

¹ In the Old English period *ege* was much more a common word used in the meaning of 'fear' than *fē̆r* – *ege* is attested about 900 times, while there are only 24 occurrences of *FÆ̆R* in this period.

² The *fē̆r(e)d* form is originally the past passive participle form of the Middle English verb *fē̆ren* 'to fear'.

- (4) a. *Malcome ... fled **for ferd**.*
 ‘Malcolm fled because of fear.’
 c1330 R. Brunne Chron. (1810) 88
- b. *3e schule fle **for ferd**.*
 ‘You shall flee because of fear.’
 c1330 Otuel (Auch) 1463
- c. *He **for ferde** lost hys wyt.*
 ‘He lost his mind because of fear.’
 c1384 Chaucer H. Fame II.m442

Interestingly, in Middle English there existed a verb FORFEAR (OED2 s. v. †FORFEAR; v. *Obs.* [f. for- prefix¹ + fear v.] *trans.* ‘to terrify’. It is attested only in the past passive participle form; which often coincides in sense with the phrase *for ferd* and it is normally followed by *of* or a subordinate clause.

- (5) a. *3iff he seþ þatt mann iss ohht **Forfæredd** off hiss sihhþe.*
 ‘If he [devil] sees that man is quite terrified of his appearance.’
 c 1200 Orm 674
- b. *He slogh him sone that ilk day; **Forfered** that he sold oght say.*
 ‘He killed him immediately on the same day, terrified that he should say something.’
 c 1320 *Seuyn Sag.* (W.) 3078

FOR FEAR started to introduce negative purpose clauses around 1300. The very first examples of subordinating FOR FEAR involved the use of the substantivised *fered*.

- (6) a. *Out of þe lond þai gun driue **For ferd** þai were y-founde.*
 ‘They drove out of the land for fear they might be found.’
 c1330(?a1300) Guy(2) (Auch) p.428
- b. ***For ferde** ate he mistraw, þou sale say þou art esau.*
 ‘For fear that he may lose faith, you shall say you are Esau.’
 a1300 Cursor M. 3651 (Cott.)

Throughout the Middle English period, the subordinator FOR FEAR was used but was also being shaped as we shall see in section 5.

- (7) a. *þai saze þe streme so stife it stonaid þam all **For ferd** [Dub: for lest] þe festing suld faile & þai in þe flode droune.*
 ‘They say the stream is so strong that it terrified them for fear the fixing should fall and they in drown in the flood.’
 c1450(?a1400) Wars Alex.(Ashm 44) 2589

- b. *Theis children nyne, All are they sonnes myne. **For ferde** or i solde þam tyne, Þerfore fledd i.*

‘These children nine – they are all my sons; for fear rather than I should lose them, therefore, I fled.’

c1440(?a1400) Perceval (Thrn) 911

FOR FEAR used in the function of a subordinator enjoyed the greatest popularity in the early Modern English period, cf.:

- (8) a. *I dar not be absent of this Medill March during this light, **for fere** the Scotts schold distroye and burne the countrie in myn absence,*
 ‘I do not dare to be absent from this Medill March during this light for fear the Scots should destroy and burn the country in my absence.’

1513 Thomas Lord Dacre To King Henry The Eighth.
 letter XXXIV

- b. *I’m sure it was alive, and it ran roaring along, and all the People ran away from it **for fear** it should eat ‘em.*

1675 duff d2b

- c. *For men are afraid to plant or sow too near their enemies Country **for fear** they should lose their Harvest.*

MSCB1685.SGM

- d. *Surely therefore every Man that hath a good Title, and can possibly come by the Deed or Evidence by which he Claims it, will Inroll his Deed at large, **for fear** he should omit any thing essential to his Title.*

LAWA1694.SGM

- e. *It is always good to be charitable to those Sort of People, **for Fear** what may happen.*

1749 H. Fielding Tom Jones IV. xii. xi. 275

In late Modern English, FOR FEAR was not so commonly used, however, it is recorded throughout the period. The present-day English subordinator *for fear* (*that*) is deemed formal by Quirk et al. (1985: 1108).

- (9) a. *I felt loath to leave the place **for fear** something would intrude itself into my heart, & rob me of my joys.*

1790hill.j4a

- b. *It is true <thru> that he airs the bank notes in the garden here, and turns the guineas in the sun, for fear <fraid> -- **for fear** <fraid> -- they’d get blue-mold <blue-mowled> -- is it?*

1847carl.f5b

- c. *I must try to make up for my exceedingly short letter of yesterday. In the first place, **for fear** I forget it again, my Aunts send their best love, including Aunt Raikes.*

1851carl.x6b

- d. *I was trembling all over **for fear** he'd think it was too much.*
 1935 ishe.f7b
- e. *Eight hours ago he would not have believed he could hold a gun in his hand **for fear** he might fire it.*
 1986 *The Bourne Supremacy*, Robert Ludlum.txt

5. Discussion

The process that goes hand in hand with desematicisation when novel grammatical structures arise is extension, i.e. linguistic expressions are extended to new contexts. In the case of the subordinator FOR FEAR, extension is evidenced when FOR FEAR is used as an indicator of the state of affairs that is perceived of as undesirable expressed in the following clause, while the content of the matrix clause describes the action that is performed as a precaution. Consider examples (6a) and (7b). The grammaticalisation mechanism of decategorialisation can also be observed in the case of FOR FEAR. A loss in morphosyntactic properties of the complementiser FOR FEAR is evidenced by a loss of discourse autonomy where the original noun FEAR loses the property of identifying participants in a discourse. In other words, FEAR is used non-referentially when it is a part of the complementiser, in that it cannot be modified by noncompulsory markers of categoriality, e.g. **for this/the fear (that)*, nor can it take the plural number inflection, as it is possible when FEAR is used as a lexical noun, compare:

- (10) a. *Al aboute **feris** [L formidines] shul gasten hym.*
 'Terrors shall make him afraid on every side.'
 (a1382) WBible(1) (Dc 369(1)) Job 18.11
- b. *The king..Hath axed hem what is **the fere**, Why thei be so despuiled there.*
 'The king asked them what fear is, why they are so stripped out of their clothes there.'
 (a1393) Gower CA (Fr3 3) 1.2205
- c. *Now helpe me, ageyne that I were hol, outh of **this fere**.*
 'Now help me again, so that I would be healthy, out of this fear.'
 ?a1475 Ludus C.(Vsp D.8) 369/402

Erosion is the last parameter to be involved; however, in the development of the subordinator FOR FEAR, erosion is not (or not yet) a relevant parameter.

Typically, in Middle English it is the conjunction *that* which additionally marks a subordinate clause, e.g. *because that, for-thī that, nōt-with-stōnding(e that, enaunter that* as, in point of fact, can be the case of FOR FEAR, consider:

- (11) a. *the mynde of God wol he [the devil] not put fro hem, **for feerde** þat he schuld be had in suspecte.*

‘He [the devil] will not take the mind of god from them lest he should be regarded as a suspect.’

a1425(?a1400) Cloud (Hrl 674) 97/12

- b. *Sir, at the reverence of God, keepe your frynds secret to your selfe, **for fere that** ye leese them.*

1502-3. Plumpton letter CVLIII,

George Emerson to sir Robart Plompton.

- c. *For yf the Kyngys Grace could have founde yt lawfull that prestys mught have byn maryd, they wold have byn to the Crowne dubbyll and dubbyll faythefull, furst in love, secondly **for fere that** the Bysshope of Rome schuld sette yn hys powre unto ther desolacyon.*

c 1539 John Foster to Lord Cromwell. Letter CVLI

- d. *That you doe vse repercussiuues, namely in the painfull places, that maie be the occasion of riping of the matter, **for feare that** you repente you, for when matter is ones placed, then neede wee not but to open the pores, whiche thyng euery manne maie doe verie easely, if he doe resort to the repercussiuues, afore described.*

1562_Bullein_BulleinsBulwarke.txt.

- e. *Grove would have had the Bullets to be Champt, **for fear that**..if the Bullets were Round, the Wound..might be Cured.*

1678 Tryals W. Ireland, T. Pickering, & J. Grove for Murder 24

What must be stressed at this point is that standard grammar books of English, e.g. Quirk (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1000) do not exclude the option of extending *FOR FEAR* with the subordinating *THAT*. It appears, however, that *FOR FEAR THAT* was not used in late Modern English at all.

A negative feeling about the realisation of the proposition expressed in the adverbial clause is sometimes reinforced by an already well-grounded negative complementiser *lest*. Consider examples in (12):

- (12) a. *But zitt bode he seuen dayes in rest **For fere** [Vsp: doute; Got: drede] **lest** any damnyng brest.*

‘But yet he remained in rest for seven days for fear a curse may break.’

a1400 Cursor (Trin-C R.3.8) 1908

- b. *I whook **for ferd lest** I wer schent.*

I shuddered for fear that I might be harmed.’

a1500(?a1400) SLChrist (Hrl 3909) 7991

- c. *And vndoubtedly the protectour loued him wel, & loth was to haue loste him, sauing **for fere lest** his life shoulde haue quailed their purpose.*

1513 MORERIC-E1-H,46.76

- d. *but if it chaunce that the wound be very great and that there be loce bones which must be had out: you shall apply a tent in the [ʏf.5vʏ]*

lower parte of the wound, **for feare lest** the wound should shut vp to soon, and by that meanes might fall to some inconuenience.

1574 Baker OleumMagistrale NORM.txt

The examples in (12) may suggest that the speakers of English perceived the expressive force of *FOR FEAR* to be not powerful enough and they supported it with an element more firmly established in the language. The linguistic material listed in (13) illustrates a phenomenon which I have labelled elsewhere an amalgamation of synonymous linguistic expressions.

A very interesting development of FOR FEAR involves the use of a complementing infinitive.

- (13) a. *I foundede faste there-fro* ***for ferde to be*** wryghede.
‘I hurried fast to and fro for fear to be found out.’
c1450(?a1400) Parl.3 Ages (Add 31042) 97
b. *It gars me quake* ***for ferde to dee.***
‘It makes me tremble for fear that I might die’
a1500(a1460) Towneley Pl.(Hnt HM 1) 46/202
c. *I was effrayit to mount so heich,* ***for feir to get ane fall.***
‘I was frightened to ascend so high for fear to take a fall.’
1597 A. Montgomerie Cherrie & Slae 346
d. *To depart out of those quarters.* ***for feare to bee murdered.***
1600 P. Holland tr. Livy Rom. Hist. (1609) xlix. Epit. 1238

To some extent, this variation resembles the possibility of complementing the purpose subordinator *in order* with the *to*-infinitive and a finite clause. However, *in order to* and *in order that* developed in the seventeenth century. In any case, this evolution is somewhat surprising for one could rather expect an opposite development, i.e. the survival of *for fear to* rather than *for fear that*, especially in the light of what Görlach (1991: 97) states: “infinitival clauses increasingly replaced finite adverbial and relative clauses – an economy more apparent than real since it involves the loss of tense and mood marking.”

6. Conclusions

This paper addresses the issue of the evolution of FOR FEAR – an adverbial subordinator introducing negative purpose clauses in mediaeval English. On the basis of the language material collected from various electronic corpora it has been shown that FOR FEAR appeared and was grammaticalised in the Early Middle English period around 1300. In the early Modern English period this construction enjoyed increased popularity. In Modern English sporadic examples of this subordinator are recorded but never with the following THAT.

As the discussion reveals, the grammaticalisation of *FOR FEAR* followed the processes of desemanticisation, extension and decategorialisation just as can be expected in accordance with the tenets of grammaticalisation. Furthermore, the development of *FOR FEAR* embodies a general principle of unidirectionality of grammatical change: the intermediate stages leading from less grammatical to more grammatical structures can be set quite precisely on the time axis.

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